

**Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

**Bhaja Govindam – Verse 23**

In this verse, the method of enquiry or questioning is being given to us, which again has been discussed in earlier verses.

कस्त्वं कोऽहं कुत आयातः का मे जननी को मे तातः ।

इति परिभावय सर्वमसारम् विश्वं त्यक्त्वा स्वप्न विचारम् ॥

*kastvaṁ ko'haṁ kuta āyātaḥ kā me jananī ko me tātaḥ,*  
*iti paribhāvaya sarvamasāram viśvaṁ tyaktoā svapna vicāram.*

Who are you? Who am I? From where did I come? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Thus enquire, leaving aside the entire world of experience, essence-less, and a mere dreamland, born of imagination.

*Iti*, in this manner may you contemplate or enquire, *paribhāvaya*. *Kastvam*, who are you? *Ko'ham*, who am I? *Kuta āyātaḥ*, from where have I come? *Kā me jananī*, who is my mother? *Ko me tātaḥ*, who is my father? It is not the name of your father or mother that is asked here. Instead, our attention is being drawn to asking these fundamental questions of ourselves.

**We all live in a world of notions**

May you focus your attention on these fundamental questions of life. Who am I? I am 'so and so', or son of 'so and so'. Is this really who I am? When I say that I am 'so and so', it means that I identify with the body. The name belongs to the body. The relationship of parent and child is also at the level of the body. Then what is the true nature of one whom I call my father? What is the true nature of the one whom I call my mother? What is the true nature of the one, whom I call 'me'? Also, what is the true nature of the one I call 'you'? Who is this 'you'? Who is this 'I'? We go on with our life without an understanding of this. I imagine that I know you, and I imagine that I know myself. We interact with one another without a proper knowledge of who we really are. When I do not know who I am, I have a notion regarding my own self, and when I don't know who you are, I have another notion regarding your self. Thus, all this *vyavahāra* or interaction is constantly going on in a world of notions. Each one is living in the midst of his or her own notions and dreams!

As we said earlier, it is like children playing a make-believe household game. Someone becomes the mother, someone becomes the father, someone becomes the son, and someone becomes the teacher, and thus they play this game. The idea of the mother, father etc. is totally superimposed and purely in the realm of the imagination. The game of our life is something similar because all these ideas are again, superimposed. That I take myself to be an individual and that I take you to be another individual is the superimposition because it is entirely imaginary. I am not what I take myself to be.

*Svapna vicāram.* Here the teacher is pointing out that you are living in a world of dream. You are not really living in reality. Even the reality about you is different from what you take it to be. There is a famous example from the stories of the life of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya himself. It is said that once, early in the morning, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya was passing along the narrow streets of Benares on his way to the Śiva temple after his ablutions. As is the custom, having had his bath in the Ganges and purified himself, he was carrying water from the Ganges in his *kamandalu* for *abhiseka* to the Lord Viśvanātha. At that time, he found a street sweeper in his path, blocking the way. Sweepers are the so-called low caste or untouchable people. The *ācārya* could not proceed on his way and so out of habit he said, *gaccha gaccha*, clear out, clear out. Before complying with the command to move away, that sweeper confronted the *ācārya* and asked him, “Oh *dvijavara*, the most reverend one among the wise, you are asking me to move away from your path. Very well, but before I move away, please clarify one thing. What is it that you are asking me to move away from? From what should I move away?”

अन्नमयादन्नमयमथवा चैतन्यमेव चैतन्यात्

*annamayādannamayamathavā caitanyameva caitanyāt*

Are you asking this lump of food to move away from what is but another lump of food? Or are you saying that I, who am consciousness, should move away from you, who are also consciousness? (Maniṣāpañcakam, 1).

“Are you trying to say that you are just this body, which is a bundle of food, and that I am also this body, another bundle of food? Just clarify this, and then I will move away.” Śrī Śaṅkarācārya was stunned, and realized that it was no ordinary sweeper; he was someone else. He immediately prostrated before the sweeper, and it turned out that the sweeper was none other than Lord Śiva himself, who had come in this form.

## Enquire into your true nature

The question is, *koham*, who am I? Am I just this body, which is a modification of food? Or am I the sense organs, the instruments of perception? Or am I the mind? Who am I? Am I someone who is different from all of them? I take myself to be the body or I take myself to be the mind, and I take myself to be an emotional being, or an intellectual being. Is that what I really am? *Iti paribhāvaya*, please ponder upon this question. Similarly, *kāme janani*, who is my mother? Is this body all that my mother is? *Ko me tātaḥ*, who is my father? Is this body all that my father is? Understand that there is a different dimension to you. You are this body alright, but you are not merely confined to this body. As long as you think that you are this body, so long will you never be able to think of or know that other dimension. Thus, the teacher is asking us to recognize that we take ourselves to be merely small individuals, and naturally, we do not know who we are. Therefore, we are living in an imaginary world. That we take this person to be our father, meaning that that person has another body, is one more aspect of our imagination, and that we take all other people as nothing more than the body, mind, or personality, is yet another aspect.

All of this is *svapna vicāra*, this dream-like world. *Viśvam tyaktvā*, give this up, give up this entire world of imagination. However, you can't give up the world. Where will you go? You can only go from one place in the world to another place. Therefore, giving up does not mean going away to some place. It means giving up this *viśva*, this world of imagination that you are living in. Understand that all these relationships are merely based on this body and this personality without taking into account the very essence of the person behind the personality. It is *saṁsāra*, and it is *asāra*, without essence. *Samśāra* is *samyak sāra*, that which is all essence, but it is *asāra*, essence-less. Therefore, having given up this essence-less interaction called *saṁsāra*, which is comparable to the dream, dwell upon these realities of life, the fundamentals of life, to become free.

Unless we start to enquire, there is no way that we can become free, because what is in fact unreal, imaginary, or comparable to a dream, is taken by us to be real. As long as an unreal thing is taken to be real, there is no way that you can get release from it, and therefore, enquire into the realities of life – realities about yourself, and all that you come across. Recognize that everything has a different dimension. Recognize that dimension alone to know yourself and to know other things.

## **We are too preoccupied with our day-to-day problems**

When can I enquire into the realities of life? When do I have the leisure or poise to dwell upon these questions? I can do so only when my mind is free from other preoccupations. I am not able to contemplate upon these fundamental things because my mind is too preoccupied with the mundane concerns of what will happen, what will not happen, what to achieve, what not to achieve, success, failure etc. Our mind needs to be free of these superficial issues, which now occupy our attention completely, for it to enjoy the leisure to dwell upon the more essential issues of life. There is no doubt that our day-to-day life has a certain reality and importance, and we do need to accord it the importance that it deserves. However, we are giving much more reality to these concerns than they actually deserve; our very existence seems to be focused entirely upon that as though nothing else exists in life. The teacher points out that life has certain other dimensions. The ocean appears to be stormy on the surface. Yet, under the surface of the ocean, there is a profound silence, which remains unperceived and inaccessible to us because of the waves and storms on the surface. Similarly, the important questions of life remain unaddressed because our mind is totally preoccupied with superficial issues. We must understand that the problems of the father, mother, past or future, wealth, name, fame, and security have a certain reality, and human birth is taken to address these important problems. However, this reality does not endure beyond the surface. In and through these apparent problems, there is something fundamental that you have to address – the truth of who I am, and who you are.

## **We take things for granted**

Unless I understand who I am, how can this *vyavahāra* be clear? The way in which I interact with the world or respond to the world is determined by how I perceive myself, and how I perceive the world. If I perceive someone as a brother, I respond in a certain way. If I perceive him as a friend, I respond in a certain other way. If I perceive him as a stranger, my response is going to be different. Then again, if I perceive myself as good, my response is different. Therefore, what determines my responses and interactions, and indeed, my life, is my perception of myself, and my perception of everything in this world. This perception is taken for granted. I never stop to question whether what I take for granted about myself and what I take for granted about the world would stand up to enquiry or not? I have never stopped to scrutinize this fundamental assumption on my part.

## **Study Vedanta, meditate upon the realities of life**

Our life is based on certain fundamental assumptions, like science is based on certain fundamental principles. What are those assumptions? I am 'so and so', you are 'so and so', the world is 'such and such', and god is 'such and such'. All of us have preconceived notions about who I am, what the nature of the world is, whether God is there or not, who God is, and how he is. Therefore, the way we perceive the objects in our life, the way we respond to all of these objects, and the way we live our life is determined by these preconceived ideas or notions. Vedanta draws our attention to these notions or assumptions.

*Koham*, who am I? I take myself to be an individual being, a small, little, insignificant creature. Is that what I really am? I may be insignificant from one standpoint. Yes, this body is an insignificant thing; this mind is also an insignificant thing. Therefore, my achievements and accomplishments can only be classified as insignificant. But, is that all I am? Or is there something else about me? *Iti paribhāvaya*, may you thus enquire. Study Vedanta. Expose yourself to the teaching of Vedanta which draws our attention to this. Thus, first come to terms with your own self. This will enable you to come to terms with the world. Determine whether or not your assumptions are right. When you have examined this, go ahead and do whatever you have to do in life. We plunge into life without knowing what life is all about or without worrying about who I am and what the nature of the world is. Therefore, may you take time to enquire.

When can I take the time to enquire? When I take time out; when I go on the sidelines, like Arjuna. He requested the Lord, his charioteer, to place his chariot between the two armies so that he could detach himself from both sides and objectively review his situation. We also need to enquire into our own life objectively and dispassionately, and review our own assumptions and notions. We can do that when we have some leisure in our life. Step aside from this life for some time. It doesn't mean that you reject this life. It means giving yourself some time. As a part of your daily routine, plan to spend some time by yourself when you can contemplate, and when you can enjoy a certain freedom or relaxation from the worries and anxieties of the day. During this time, focus your attention on these problems and contemplate on these realities. That is what we call meditation. Meditation is not just closing the eyes and sitting idle

or focusing on your breathing. Meditation is this kind of an inquiry. It includes focusing your attention on these basic problems of life<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.